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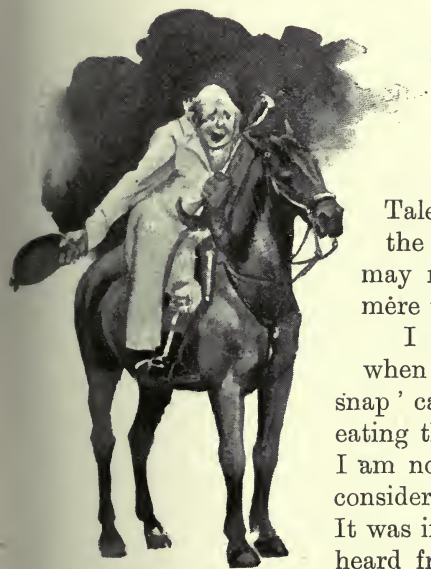
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THE
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A GRAND FILLY

BY E. Æ. SOMERVILLE



I AM an Englishman. I say this without either truculence or vainglorying, rather with humility—a mere Englishman, who submits his Plain Tale from the Western Hills with the conviction that the Kelt who may read it will think him more *mère* than ever.

I was in Yorkshire last season when what is trivially called 'the cold snap' came upon us. I had five horses eating themselves silly all the time, and I am not going to speak of it. I don't consider it a subject to be treated lightly. It was in about the thickest of it that I heard from a man I know in Ireland.

He is a little old horse-coping sportsman with a red face and iron-grey whiskers, who has kept hounds all his life; or, rather, he has always had hounds about, on much the same conditions that other men have rats. The rats are indubitably there, and feed themselves variously, and so do old

Robert Trinder's 'Rioters,' which is their *nom de guerre* in the County Corkerry (the few who know anything of the map of Ireland may possibly identify the two counties buried in this cryptogram).

I meet old Robert most years at the Dublin Horse Show, and every now and then he has sold me a pretty good horse, so when he wrote and renewed a standing invitation, assuring me that there was open weather, and that he had a grand four-year-old filly to sell, I took him at his word, and started at once. The journey lasted for twenty-eight hours, going hard all the time, and during the last three of them there were no foot-warmers and the cushions became like stones enveloped in mustard plasters. Old Trinder had not sent to the station for me, and it was pelting rain, so I had to drive seven miles in a thing that only exists south of Limerick Junction, and is called a 'jingle.' A jingle is a square box of painted canvas with no back to it, because, as was luminously explained to me, you must have some way to get into it, and I had to sit sideways in it, with my portmanteau bucking like a three-year-old on the seat opposite to me. It fell out on the road twice going uphill. After the second fall my hair tonic slowly oozed forth from the seams, and added a fresh ingredient to the smells of the grimy cushions and the damp hay that furnished the machine. My hair tonic costs eight-and-sixpence a bottle.

There is probably not in the United Kingdom a worse-planned entrance gate than Robert Trinder's. You come at it obliquely on the side of a crooked hill, squeeze between its low pillars with an inch to spare each side, and immediately drop down a yet steeper hill, which lasts for the best part of a quarter of a mile. The jingle went swooping and jerking down into the unknown, till, through the portholes on either side of the driver's legs, I saw Lisangle House. It had looked decidedly better in large red letters at the top of old Robert's notepaper than it did at the top of his lawn, being no more than a square yellow box of a house, that had been made a fool of by being promiscuously trimmed with battlements. Just as my jingle tilted me in backwards against the flight of steps, I heard through the open door a loud and piercing yell; following on it came the thunder of many feet, and the next instant a hound bolted down the steps with a large plucked turkey in its mouth. Close in its wake fled a brace of puppies, and behind them, variously armed, pursued what appeared to be the staff of Lisangle House. They went past me in full cry, leaving a general impression of dirty aprons, flying

hair, and onions, and I feel sure that there were bare feet somewhere in it. My carman leaped from his perch and joined in the chase, and the whole party swept from my astonished gaze round or into a clump of bushes. At this juncture I was not sorry to hear Robert Trinder's voice greeting me as if nothing unusual were occurring.

'Upon me honour, it's the Captain! You're welcome, sir, you're welcome! Come in, come in, don't mind the horse at all; he'll eat the grass there as he's done many a time before! When the gerr'ls have old Amazon cot they'll bring in your things.'

(Perhaps I ought to mention at once that Mr. Trinder belongs to the class who are known in Ireland as 'Half-sirs.' You couldn't say he was a gentleman, and he himself wouldn't have tried to say so. But, as a matter of fact, I have seen worse imitations.)

Robert was delighted to see me, and I had had a whisky-and-soda and been shown two or three more hound puppies before it occurred to him to introduce me to his aunt. I had not expected an aunt, as Robert is well on the heavenward side of sixty; but there she was: she made me think of a badly preserved Egyptian mummy with a brogue. I am always a little afraid of my hostess, but there was something about Robert's aunt that made me know I was a worm. She came down to dinner in a bonnet and black kid gloves—a circumstance that alone was awe-inspiring. She sat entrenched at the head of the table behind an enormous dish of thickly jacketed potatoes, and, though she scorned to speak to Robert or me, she kept up a sort of whispered wrangle with the parlour-maid all the time. The latter's red hair hung down over her shoulders—and at intervals over mine also—in horrible luxuriance, and recalled the leading figure in the pursuit of Amazon; there was, moreover, something about the heavy boots in which she tramped round the table that suggested that Amazon had sought sanctuary in the cowhouse. I have done some roughing it in my time, and I am not over-particular, but I admit that it was rather a shock to meet the turkey itself again, more especially as it was the sole item of the *menu*. There was no doubt of its identity, as it was short of a leg, and half the breast had been shaved away. The aunt must have read my thoughts in my face. She fixed her small implacable eyes on mine for one quelling instant, then she looked at Robert. Her nephew was obviously afraid to meet her eye; he coughed uneasily, and handed a surreptitious potato to the puppy who was sitting under his chair.

'This place is rotten with dogs,' said the aunt; with which announcement she retired from the conversation, and fell again to the slaughter of the parlour-maid. I timidly ate my portion of turkey and tried not to think about the cowhouse.

It rained all night. I could hear the water hammering into something that rang like a gong; and each time I rolled over in the musty trough of my feather-bed I fractiously asked myself why the mischief they had left the tap running all night. Next morning the matter was explained when, on demanding a bath, I was told that 'there wasn't but one in the house, and 'twas undher the rain-down. But sure ye can have it,' with which it was dragged in full of dirty water and flakes of whitewash, and when I got out of it I felt as if I had been through the Bankruptcy Court.

The day was windy and misty—a combination of weather possible only in Ireland—but there was no snow, and Robert Trinder, seated at breakfast in a purple-red hunting coat, dingy drab breeches, and woollen socks, assured me that it was turning out a grand morning.

I distinctly liked the looks of my mount when Jerry, the Whip, pulled her out of the stable for me. She was big and brown, with hindquarters that looked like jumping; she was also very dirty and obviously underfed. None the less she was lively enough, and justified Jerry's prediction that 'she'd be apt to shake a couple or three bucks out of herself when she'd see the hounds.' Old Robert was on an ugly brute of a yellow horse, rather like a big mule, who began the day by bucking out of the yard gate as if he had been trained by Buffalo Bill. It was at this juncture that I first really respected Robert Trinder; his retention of his seat was so unstudied, and his command of appropriate epithets so complete.

Jerry and the hounds awaited us on the road, the latter as mixed a party as I have ever come across. There were about fourteen couple in all, and they ranged in style from a short-legged black-and-tan harrier, who had undoubtedly had an uncle who was a dachshund, to a thing with a head like a greyhound, a snow-white body, and a feathered stern that would have been a credit to a setter. In between these extremes came several broken-haired Welshmen, some dilapidated 24-inch foxhounds, and a lot of pale-coloured hounds, whose general effect was that of the table-cloth on which we had eaten our breakfast that morning, being dirty white, covered with stains that looked like either tea or egg, or both.

'Them's the old Irish breed,' said Robert, as the yellow horse voluntarily stopped short to avoid stepping on one of them; 'there's no better. That Gaylass there would take a line up Patrick Street on a fair day, and you'd live and die seeing her kill rats.'

I am bound to say I thought it more likely that I should live to see her and some of her relations killing sheep, judging by their manners along the road; but we got to Letter crossroads at last with no more than an old hen and a wandering cur dog on our collective consciences. The road and its adjacent fences were thronged with foot people, mostly strapping young men and boys, in the white flannel coats and slouched felt hats that strike a stranger with their unusualness and picturesqueness.

'Do you ever have a row with Land Leaguers?' I asked, noting their sticks, while the warnings of a sentimental Radical friend as to the danger of encountering an infuriated Irish peasantry suddenly assumed plausibility.

'Land League? The dear help ye! Who'd be bothered with the Land League here?' said Robert, shoving the yellow horse into the crowd; 'let the hounds through, boys, can't ye? No, Captain, but 'tis Saint November's Day, as they call it, a great holiday, and there isn't a ruffian in the country but has come out with his blagyard dog to head the fox!'

A grin of guilt passed over the faces of the audience.

'There's plinty foxes in the hill, Mr. Thrinder,' shouted one of them; 'Dan Murphy says there isn't a morning but he'd see six or eight o' them hoppin' there.'

'Faith, 'tis throe for you,' corroborated Dan Murphy. 'If ye had thim gethered in a quarther of ground and dhropped a pin from th' elements, 'twould reach one o' thim!'

(As a matter of fact, I haven't a notion what Mr. Murphy meant, but that is what he said, so I faithfully record it.)

The riders were farmers and men of Robert's own undetermined class, and there was hardly a horse out who was more than four years old, saving two or three who were nineteen. Robert pushed through them and turned up a bohieren—*i.e.* a narrow and incredibly badly made lane—and I presently heard him cheering the hounds into covert. As to that covert, imagine a hill that in any civilised country would be called a mountain: its nearer side a cliff, with just enough slope to give root-hold to giant furzebushes, its summit a series of rocky and boggy terraces, trending down at one end into a ravine, and at the other becoming merged in the depths of an aboriginal wood of low

scrubby oak trees. It seemed as feasible to ride a horse over it as over the roof of York Minster. I hadn't the vaguest idea what to do or where to go, and I claved to Jerry the Whip.

The hounds were scrambling like monkeys along the side of the hill; so were the country boys with their curs; old Trinder moved parallel with them along its base. Jerry galloped away to the ravine, and there dismounting, struggled up by zigzag cattle paths to the comparative levels of the summit. I did the same, and was pretty well blown by the time I got to the top, as the filly scorned the zigzags, and hauled me up as straight as she could go over the rocks and furzebushes. A few other fellows had followed us, and we all pursued on along the top of the hill.

Suddenly Jerry stopped short and held up his hand. A hound spoke below us, then another, and then came a holloa from Jerry that made the filly quiver all over. The fox had come up over the low fence that edged the cliff, and was running along the terrace in front of us. Old Robert below us—I could almost have chucked a stone on to him—gave an answering screech, and one by one the hounds fought their way up over the fence and went away on the line, throwing their tongues in a style that did one good to hear. Our only way ahead lay along a species of trench between the hill, on whose steep side we were standing, and the cliff fence. Jerry kicked the spurs into his good ugly little horse, and making him jump down into the trench, squeezed along it after the hounds. But the delay of waiting for them had got the filly's temper up. When I faced her at the trench she reared, and whirled round, and pranced backwards in, considering the circumstances, a highly discomposing way. The rest of the field crowded through the furze past me and down into the trench, and twice I thought the mare would land herself and me on top of one of them. I don't wonder she was frightened. I know I was. There was nothing between us and a hundred-foot drop but this narrow trench and a low, rotten fence, and the fool behaved as though she wanted to jump it all. I hope no one will ever erect an equestrian statue in my honour; now that I have experienced the sensation of ramping over nothing, I find I dislike it. I believe I might have been there now, but just then a couple of hounds came up, and before I knew what she was at, the filly had jumped down after them into the trench as if she had been doing it all her life. I was not long about picking the others up; the filly could gallop anyhow, and we thundered on over ground where, had I

been on foot, I should have liked a guide and an alpenstock. At intervals we jumped things made of sharp stones, and slates, and mud; I don't know whether they were banks or walls. Sometimes the horses changed feet on them, sometimes they flew the



WHEN I FACED HER AT THE TRENCH SHE REARED AND WHIRLED ROUND

whole affair, according to their individual judgment. Sometimes we were splashing over sedgy patches that looked and felt like buttered toast, sometimes floundering through stuff resembling an ill-made chocolate soufflé, whether intended for a ploughed

field or a partially-drained bog-hole I could not determine, and all was fenced as carefully as cricket-pitches. Presently the hounds took a swing to the left and over the edge of the hill again, and our leader Jerry turned sharp off after them, down a track that seemed to have been dug out of the face of the hill. I should have liked to get off and lead, but they did not give me time, and we suddenly found ourselves joined to Robert Trinder and his company of infantry, all going hard for the oak-wood that I mentioned before.

It was pretty to see the yellow horse jump. Nothing came amiss to him, and he didn't seem able to make a mistake. There was a stone stile out of a bohieren that stopped everyone, and he changed feet on the flag on top and went down by the steps on the other side. No one need believe this unless they like, but I saw him do it. The country boys were most exhilarating. How they got there I don't know, but they seemed to spring up before us wherever we went. They cheered every jump, they pulled away the astounding obstacles that served as gates (such as the end of an iron bedstead, a broken harrow, or a couple of cartwheels), and their power of seeing the fox through a stone wall or a hill could only be equalled by the Röntgen rays. We fought our way through the oak-wood, and out over a boggy bounds ditch into open country at last. The Rioters had come out of the wood on a screaming scent, and big and little were running together in a compact body, followed, like the tail of a kite, by a string of yapping country curs. The country was all grass, enchantingly green and springy; the jumps were big, yet not too big, and there were no two alike; the filly pulled hard, but not too hard, and she was jumping like a deer; I felt that all I had heard of Irish hunting had not been overstated.

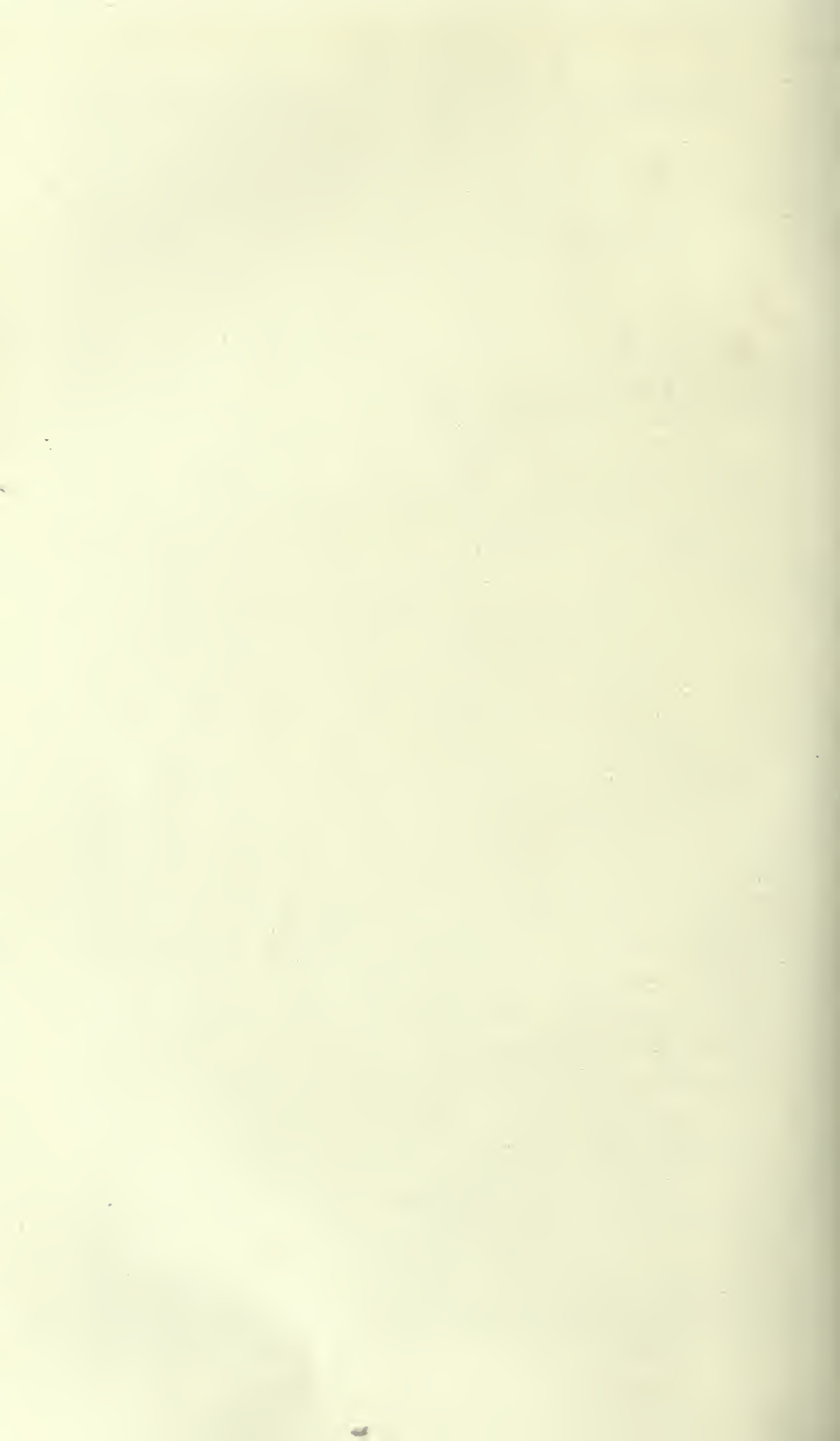
We had been running for half an hour when we checked at a farmhouse; the yellow horse had been leading the hunt all the time, making a noise like a steam-engine, but perfectly undefeated, and our numbers were reduced to five. An old woman and a girl rushed out of the yard to meet us, screaming like sea-gulls.

'He's gone south this five minutes! I was out spreadin' clothes, and I seen him circling round the Kerry cow, and he as big as a man!' screamed the girl.

'He was, the thief!' yelled the old woman. 'I seen him firsh on the hill, cringeing behind a rock, and he hardly able to thrail the tail afther him!'



AN OLD WOMAN AND A GIRL RUSHED OUT, SCREAMING LIKE SEAGULLS



'Run now, like a good girl, and show me where did he cross the fence,' said old Robert, puffing and blowing, as with a purple face he hurried into the yard to collect the hounds, who, like practised foragers, had already overrun the farmhouse, as was evidenced by an indignant and shrieking flight of fowls through the open door.

The girl ran, snatching off her red plaid shawl as she went.

'Here's the shpot now!' she called out, flinging the shawl down on the fence; 'here's the very way just that he wint! Go south to the gap; I'll pull the pole out for ye—this is a cross place.'

The hunt gratefully accepted her good offices. She tore the monstrous shaft of a cart out of a place that with it was impossible, and without it was a boggy scramble, and as we began to gallop again, I began to think there was a good deal to be said in favour of the New Woman.

I suppose we had had another quarter of an hour, when the mist, that had been hanging about all day, came down on us, and it was difficult to see more than a field ahead. We had got down on to lower ground, and we were in a sort of marshy hollow when we were confronted by the most serious obstacle of the day: a tall and obviously rotten bank clothed in briars, with sharp stones along its top, a wide ditch in front of it, and a disgustingly squashy take-off. Robert Trinder and the yellow horse held their course undaunted: the rest of the field turned as one man, and went for another way round—I, in my arrogance, followed the Master. The yellow horse rose out of the soft ground with quiet, indescribable ease, got a foothold on the side of the bank for his hind legs, and was away into the next field without pause or mistake.

'Go round, Captain!' shouted Trinder; 'it's a bad place!'

I hardly heard him; I was already putting the filly at it for the second time. It took about three minutes for her to convince me that she and Robert were right, and I was wrong, and by that time everybody was out of sight, swallowed up in the mist. I tried round after the others, and found their footmarks up a lane and across a field; a loose stone wall confronted me, and I rode at it confidently; but the filly, soured by our recent encounter, reared and would have none of it. I tried yet another way round, and put her at a moderate and seemingly innocuous bank, at which, with the contrariety of her sex, she rushed at a thousand miles an hour. It looked somehow as if there might be a bit of a drop,

but the filly had got her beastly blood up, and I have been in a better temper myself.

She rose to the jump when she was a good six feet from it. I knew she would not put an iron on it, and I sat down for the drop. It came with a vengeance. I had a glimpse of a thatched roof below me, and the next instant we were on it, or in it—I don't know which. It gave way with a crash of rafters, the mare's forelegs went in, and I was shot over her head, rolled over the edge of the roof, and fell on my face into a manure heap. A yell and a pig burst simultaneously from the door, a calf followed, and while I struggled up out of my oozy resting-place, I was aware of the filly's wild face staring from the door of the shed in which she so unexpectedly found herself. The broken reins trailed round her legs, she was panting and shivering, and blood was trickling down the white blaze on her nose. I got her out through the low doorway with a little coaxing, and for a moment hardly dared to examine as to the amount of damage done. She was covered with cobwebs and dirt out of the roof, and, as I led her forward, she went lame on one foreleg; but beyond this, and a good many scratches, there was nothing wrong. My own appearance need not here be dilated upon. I was cleaning off what they call in Ireland 'the biggest of the filth' with a bunch of heather, when from a cottage a little bit down the lane in which I was standing a small barelegged child emerged. It saw me, uttered one desperate howl, and fled back into the house. I abandoned my toilet and led the mare to the cottage door.

'Is anyone in?' I said to the house at large.

A fresh outburst of yells was the sole response; there was a pattering of bare feet, and somewhere in the smoky gloom a door slammed. It was clearly a case of 'Not at Home' in its conventional sense. I scribbled Robert Trinder's name on one of my visiting cards, laid it and half a sovereign on a table by the door, and started to make my way home.

The south of Ireland is singularly full of people. I do not believe you can go a quarter of a mile on any given road without meeting someone, and that someone is sure to be conversationally disposed and glad of the chance of answering questions. By dint of asking a good many, I eventually found myself on the high road, with five miles between me and Lisangle. The mare's lameness had nearly worn off, and she walked beside me like a dog. After all, I thought, I had had the best of the day, had come safely out of what might have been a nasty business, and was supplied with a story on which to dine out for the rest of my life.

My only anxiety was as to whether I could hope for a bath when I got in—a luxury that had been hideously converted by the locale of my fall into a necessity. I led the filly in the twilight down the dark Lisangle drive, feeling all the complacency of a man who



I HAD A GLIMPSE OF A THATCHED ROOF BELOW ME

knows he has gone well in a strange country, and was just at the turn to the yard when I came upon an extraordinary group. All the women of the household were there, gathered in a tight circle round some absorbing central fact; all were shrieking at the tops

of their voices, and the turkey cock in the yard gobbled in response to each shriek.

‘Ma’am, ma’am!’ I heard, ‘ye’ll pull the tail off him!’

‘Twisht the tink-an now, Bridgie! Twisht it!’

‘Holy Biddy! the masther’ll kill us!’

What the deuce were they at? and what was a ‘tink-an’? I dragged the filly nearer, and discovered that a hound puppy was the central point of the tumult, and was being contended for, like the body of Moses, by Miss Trinder and Bridgie the parlour-maid. Both were seated on the ground pulling at the puppy for all they were worth; Miss Trinder had him by the back of his neck and his tail, while Bridgie was dragging—what *was* she dragging at? Then I saw that the puppy’s head was



jammed in a narrow-necked tin milk-can, and that, as things were going, he would wear it, like the Man in the Iron Mask, for the rest of his life.

The small, grim face of Robert’s aunt was scarlet with exertion; her black bonnet had slipped off her head, and the thin grey hair that was ordinarily wound round her little skull as tightly as cotton on a reel was hanging in scanty wisps from its central knot; nevertheless, she was, metaphorically speaking, pulling Bridgie across the line every time. I gave the filly to one of the audience, and took Bridgie’s place at the ‘tink-an.’ Miss Trinder and I put our backs into it, and suddenly I found myself flat on mine, with the ‘tink-an’ grasped in both hands above my head.

A composite whoop of triumph rose from the spectators, and

the filly rose with it. She went straight up on her hind legs, and the next instant she was away across the drive and into the adjoining field, and, considering all things, I don't blame her. We all ran after her. I led, and the various female retainers strung out after me like a flight of wildduck, uttering cries of various encouragement and consternation. Miss Trinder followed, silent and indomitable, at the heel of the hunt, and the released puppy, who had also harked in, could be heard throwing his tongue in the dusky shrubbery ahead of us. It was all exasperatingly absurd, as things seem to have a habit of being in Ireland. I never felt more like a fool in my life, and the bitterest part of it was that it was all I could do to keep ahead of Bridgie. As for the filly, she waited till we got near her, and then she jumped a five-foot coped wall into the road, fell, picked herself up, and clattered away into darkness. At this point I heard Robert's horn, and sundry confused shouts and sounds informed me that the filly had run into the hounds.

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She was found next day on the farm where she was bred, fifteen miles away. The farmer brought her back to Lisangle. She had injured three hounds, upset two old women and a donkey-cart, broken a gate, and finally, on arriving at the place of her birth, had, according to the farmer, 'fired the divil's pelt of a kick into her own mother's stomach.' Moreover, she 'hadn't as much sound skin on her as would bait a rat-trap'—I here quote Mr. Trinder—and she had fever in all her feet.

Of course I bought her. I could hardly do less. I told Robert he might give her to the hounds, but he sent her over to me in a couple of months as good as new, and I won the regimental steeplechase cup with her last April.

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